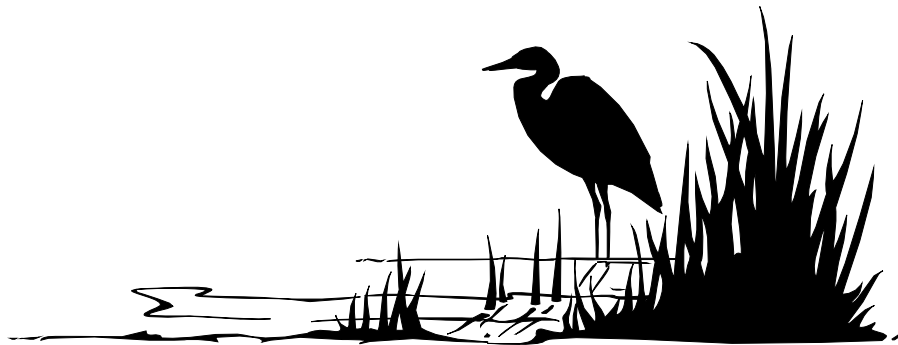


Aitkin County

**BUFFER
ORDINANCE**



**Adopted September 12, 2017
Effective September 12, 2017**

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AITKIN COUNTY BUFFER ORDINANCE

The Aitkin County Board of Commissioners of Aitkin County, Minnesota Ordains:

1.0 STATUTORY AUTHORIZATION AND POLICY

1.1 **Statutory Authorization.** This buffer ordinance is adopted pursuant to the authorization and policies contained in Minn. Stat. 103F.48 and the county planning and zoning enabling legislation in Minn. Stat. Chapter 394.

1.2 **Purpose and Intent.** It is the purpose and intent of the County to:

A. Provide for riparian vegetated buffers and water quality practices to achieve the following purposes:

- (1) Protect state water resources from erosion and runoff pollution;
- (2) Stabilize soils, shores and banks; and
- (3) Protect or provide riparian corridors.

B. Coordinate the implementation and enforcement of the water resources riparian protection requirements of Minn. Stat. 103F.48 with the shoreland management rules and ordinances adopted under the authority of Minn. Stat. 103F.201 to 103F.227 adopted under the authority of and the management of public drainage systems established under Minn. Stat. Chapter 103E where applicable; and

C. Provide efficient and effective direction to landowners and protection of surface water quality and related land resources.

2.0 DEFINITIONS AND GENERAL PROVISIONS

2.1 **Definitions.** Unless specifically defined below, words or phrases used in this ordinance shall be interpreted to give them the same meaning they have in common usage and to give this ordinance it's most reasonable application. For the purpose of this ordinance, the words "must" and "shall" are mandatory and not permissive. All distances, unless otherwise specified, are measured horizontally.

2.1.1 **"Buffer"** has the meaning provided in Minn. Stat. 103F.48, Subd.1(c).

2.1.2 **"Buffer protection map"** has the meaning provided in Minn. Stat. 103F.48, Subd.1(d) and available on the Department of Natural Resources website.

2.1.3 **"BWSR"** means the Board of Water and Soil Resources.

2.1.4 “**County**” means Aitkin County a political subdivision in the state of Minnesota.

2.1.5 “**Cultivation farming**” means practices that disturb root or soil structure or that impair the viability of perennial vegetation due to cutting or harvesting near the soil surface.

2.1.6 “**Drainage authority**” has the meaning provided in Minn. Stat. 103E.005, subd.9.

2.1.7 “**Landowner**” means the holder of the fee title, the holder’s agents or assigns, any lessee, licensee, or operator of the real property and includes all land occupiers as defined by Minn. Stat. 103F.401, subd. 7 or any other party conducting farming activities on or exercising control over the real property.

2.1.8 “**Local water management authority**” has the meaning provided in Minn. Stat. 103F.48, Subd.1(g).

2.1.9 “**Normal water level**” means the level evidenced by the long-term presence of surface water as indicated directly by hydrophytic plants or hydric soils or indirectly determined via hydrological models or analysis.

2.1.10 “**Public drainage system**” has the meaning given in Minn. Stat. 103E.005, subd.12.

2.1.11 “**SWCD**” means the Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District.

2.2 **Severability.** If any section, clause, provision or portion of this ordinance is adjudged unconstitutional or invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this ordinance shall not be affected thereby.

2.3 **Interpretation.** In their interpretation and application, the provisions of this ordinance shall be held to be minimum requirements and shall be liberally construed in favor of the governing body and shall not be deemed a limitation or repeal of any other powers granted by State Statutes.

2.4 **Data sharing/management.**

2.3.1 The county may enter into arrangements with an SWCD, a watershed district if applicable, BWSR and other parties with respect to the creation and maintenance of, and access to, data concerning buffers and alternative practices under this ordinance.

2.3.2 The County will manage all such data in accordance with the Minnesota Data Practices Act and any other applicable laws.

3.0 JURISDICTION

3.1 **Jurisdiction.** The provisions of this ordinance apply to all waters, including public drainage systems for which the County is the drainage authority under Minn. Stat. Chapter 103E, shown on the buffer protection map.

4.0 BUFFER REQUIREMENTS

4.1 **Compliance determinations.** Compliance status will be determined by the soil and water conservation district on a parcel by parcel basis as identified by a unique locally defined property identification number or description and the compliance status of each bank, or edge of a water body on an individual parcel will be determined independently.

4.2 **Buffer width.** Except as provided in subsection 4.5 and 4.6, a landowner must establish and maintain a buffer area as follows:

(a) Fifty (50) foot width-buffer as measured according to subsection 4.3 for waters shown on the buffer protection map requiring said width, unless a greater width is required in Sections 5.31 and 5.62 of the Aitkin County Shoreland Management Ordinance.

(b) Sixteen and a half (16.5) foot minimum width buffer as provided in Minn. Stat. 103F.48, sub 3 and as measured according to subsection 4.3 for waters shown on the buffer protection map requiring said width, unless a greater width is required in Sections 5.31 and 5.62 of the Aitkin County Shoreland Management Ordinance.

4.3 Measurement.

(a) The measurement of the required buffer on land adjacent to a water requiring a fifty (50) foot width buffer must be from the top or crown of the bank. Where there is no defined bank, measurement must be from the edge of the normal water level as provided in Minn. Stat. 103F.48, sub 3(c).

(b) The measurement of the required buffer on land adjacent to a water requiring a sixteen and a half (16.5) foot minimum width buffer must be in the same manner as for measuring the vegetated grass strip under Minn. Stat. 103E.021.

4.4 **Use of Buffer Area.** A buffer as defined in this ordinance may not be put to any use that would remove or prevent the permanent growth of perennial vegetation, such as cultivation farming, except as provided in sections 4.5 and 4.6.

4.5 **Exemptions.** The requirement of subsection 4.1 does not apply to land that is exempted under Minn.Stat.103F.48, Subd.5.

4.6 Alternative Practices. As provided in Minn. Stat. 103F.48, sub 3(b) an owner of land that is used for cultivation farming may demonstrate compliance with subsection 4.2 by establishing and maintaining an alternative riparian water quality practice(s), or combination of structural, vegetative, and management practice(s) which provide water quality protection comparable to the water quality protection provided by a required buffer as defined in subsections 4.1 to 4.3, based on:

(a) the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide ;

(b) common alternative practices adopted and published by BWSR;

(c) practices based on local conditions approved by the SWCD that are consistent with the Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide; or

(b) Other practices adopted by BWSR.

4.7 Grandfathering. Where the provision of any statute, other ordinance or regulation imposes greater restrictions than this ordinance, the provisions of such statute, other ordinance or regulation shall be controlling. Parcels grandfathered in for other preexisting land uses shall not be grandfathered in with respect to these provisions and with respect to compliance with the Buffer Law, Minn. Stat. 103F.48.

5.0 COMPLIANCE DETERMINATIONS

5.1 Notification of Noncompliance. When the County observes a potential noncompliance or receives a third party complaint from a private individual or entity, or from another public agency, it will consult with the SWCD to determine the appropriate course of action to confirm compliance status. This may include communication with the landowner or operator, inspection or other appropriate steps necessary to verify the compliance status of the parcel. On the basis of this coordination, the SWCD may issue a notification of noncompliance to the County. If the SWCD does not issue such a notification, the County will not pursue a compliance or enforcement action under Minnesota Statutes 103F.48 and subsection 6.2.

5.1.1 At anytime during noncompliance, the landowner or operator may provide documentation of compliance to the SWCD. The SWCD will evaluate the documentation, or review the buffer and/or alternative practices to determine if the parcel is in compliance and issue its determination in writing to the landowner or operator. The SWCD may issue a validation of compliance if applicable and requested by the landowner or operator. A validation of compliance must also be sent to

the County. The SWCD must send a copy of a noncompliance determination to the County and BWSR.

5.2 Corrective Action Notice. On receipt of a notification of noncompliance, the County will issue the landowner of record a corrective action notice that will:

(a) include a list of corrective actions needed to come into compliance with the requirements of Minn. Stat, 103F.48;

(b) provide a time line for complying with this notice;

(c) provide a compliance standard against which it will judge the corrective action; and

(d) include a statement that failure to respond to this notice will result in criminal charges filed by the County.

The County in its judgment also may name as a responsible party a tenant of other person with control over that part of the property subject to section 4.0. The County may deliver or transmit the corrective action notice by any means reasonably determined to reach the landowner or operator, and will document receipt. However, a failure to document receipt will not preclude the County from demonstrating receipt or knowledge of the corrective action notice in an enforcement proceeding under section 6.0. The County must send a copy of the notice to the SWCD and BWSR.

5.2.1 At any time during noncompliance, the landowner or operator may provide documentation of compliance to the SWCD or County. In addition, the landowner or operator may supply information in support of a request to modify a corrective action or the timeline for compliance. On the basis of any such submittal or at its own discretion, the County, in writing, may modify the corrective action notice and timeline in accordance with this section. The SWCD should determine if the noncompliance has been fully corrected and issue its determination in writing to the landowner or operator and the County.

5.2.2 The SWCD may issue a validation of compliance if requested by the landowner. On County receipt of the validation the corrective action notice will be deemed withdrawn for the purpose of section 6.0, and the subject property will not be subject to enforcement under that section.

5.2.3 A notice of noncompliance is not considered a final decision subject to appeal to BWSR.

5.3 Appeals. Appeals of Section 5.1 and 5.2 may be taken by any person aggrieved, or by any officer, department, board, or bureau of a town, municipality, county, or state, by filing with the Board of Adjustment according to Section 10.09 of the Aitkin County Zoning Ordinance.

6.0 ENFORCEMENT

6.1 A landowner who does not comply with the corrective action notice issued under section 5.0 shall be remedied as a misdemeanor and shall be punishable as defined by law.

6.2 Any person, firm or corporation who violates, disobeys, omits, neglects or refuses to comply with, or who resists the enforcement of any other provisions of this ordinance shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by \$1000.00 and/or 90 days imprisonment or both. Each day that a violation is permitted to exist shall constitute a separate offense. The County Attorney shall have the authority to prosecute any and all violations of this Ordinance.

6.3 In the event of a violation or a threatened violation of this ordinance, Aitkin County, in addition to other remedies, may institute appropriate actions or proceedings to prevent, restrain, or abate such violations or threatened violations. The County may and is empowered to issue citations for violations of this Ordinance.

Adopted by the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners this 12th Day of


September, 2017.


Chairperson
Aitkin County Board of Commissioners

Attest:


Jessica Seibert
Aitkin County Administrator

Approved as to Form:


Jim Ratz
Aitkin County Attorney



A441380

**Office of the County Recorder
Aitkin County, Minnesota**

**I HEREBY CERTIFY THE WITHIN INSTRUMENT WAS
FILED, AND/OR RECORDED ON 9/12/2017 9:00 AM**

PACKAGE: 55992 REC FEE: \$0.00

Michael T. Moriarty, Aitkin County Recorder

RECORDED
TRACT INDEX
GRANTOR
GRANTEE
COMPARED